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A Shabby Business

The Soviet Union has been held up for scorn for years in this country because of the control it exercises over books and periodicals published within its boundaries. Now Geoffrey Wolff, book editor of the Washington Post, has disclosed in Book Week that U.S. government agencies have been secretly producing manuscripts and getting them printed by private companies in this country without giving the public so much as a hint that the government is involved in these enterprises in any way.

Wolff points out that recently the highly respected quarterly Foreign Affairs printed an article supporting our Vietnamese policy by a George Carver without disclosing that Carver is with the Central Intelligence Agency. There is a question whether Foreign Affairs editors even knew under whose sponsorship Carver wrote his piece.

Hearings before the House Committee on Appropriations, Wolff reports, produced testimony from Reed Harris, director of the United States Information Agency's Information Center Service, that the U.S.I.A. has a "Book Development Program" that produces and subsidizes the publication of books by private companies without divulging their source or real purpose. With remarkable candor, Harris testified that "we control the things from the very idea down to the final edited manuscript."

Among the U.S.I.A.-inspired books in 1965 was "The Truth About the Dominican Republic" by Jay Mallin. The United States' intervention in the Dominican Republic has been the object of much criticism in this country, as well as in others. Although the U.S.I.A. is required by law to confine its propaganda activities to other countries, here it is producing a piece of propaganda that is being sold in the United States with the implication that it is the work of an independent observer who has done his job objectively.

The U.S.I.A. sired four such books in 1965, at a cost of \$90,258 to the taxpayers — who, as Geoffrey Wolff reminds us, had to pay the full market price for the books if they wished to obtain them. At no point did the U.S.I.A. reveal the auspices or conditions under which these books were written and published. The reason it did not was put baldly by Leonard Marks, director of U.S.I.A., in his testimony before the House group. "It minimizes their value," he said.

A book issued by the government may be accurate and valid; but the reader has a right to know that the government is involved in its publication. To issue such books under the imprints of private companies that regularly and usually publish "unofficial" books is grossly misleading. It smells heavily of brain washing and thought control, and it tars us with the same brush we have been using on the Communists all these years.